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Implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade

Note by the Secretary-General

The Secretary-General hereby transmits the report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) on the implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade in accordance with the General Assembly resolution 57/166 of 18 December 2002.**

* A/59/150.

** The report could not be submitted at the slotted time, as UNESCO had sent the report on 12 August 2004.



Implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade

Report of the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

Summary

In its resolution 57/166 of 18 December 2002, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General of the United Nations, in cooperation with the Director-General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to prepare a report on the implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade to be presented to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session. The report has four main aims: first, to report on the international, regional and national activities undertaken to launch the Decade; second, to provide information on the activities of United Nations organizations and other partners to advance literacy during 2003 and through to May 2004; third, to present examples of current literacy projects from around the world to demonstrate what is being done to address the objectives of the Literacy Decade internationally, nationally and locally; and fourth, to offer recommendations to strengthen the Literacy Decade effort.

The report highlights the fact that present indicators suggest that the international community will not meet the literacy commitments made either by the end of the Literacy Decade in 2012 or by the education-for-all (EFA) target date of 2015 if present trends continue. Illiteracy is a serious problem, for individuals, communities and societies alike, that needs far greater attention and resources than it is currently receiving. The fundamental purpose of the Literacy Decade is to increase national and international efforts to address this problem. The time for action has come.

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I. Introduction

A. Overview

1. In its resolution 56/116 of 19 December 2001 entitled "United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all", the General Assembly decided that the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) should take on a coordinating role in stimulating and catalysing the activities undertaken at the international level within the framework of the Decade. Further, in its resolution 57/166 of 18 December 2002, the Assembly requested the Secretary-General, in cooperation with the Director-General of UNESCO, to prepare a report on the implementation of the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade to be submitted to the Assembly at its fifty-ninth session opening in September 2004.

2. The present report presents an overview of the challenges the world must overcome to meet the literacy objectives established for the Decade. It strongly argues that increased political and financial support to tackle illiteracy is urgently required. The report warns that from present indications, the international community will not meet the literacy commitments it has made either by the end of the decade in 2012 or by the education-for-all (EFA) target date of 2015 if present trends continue.

3. Nevertheless, the Decade probably represents our best chance to deal with this issue. Illiteracy is a serious problem, for individuals, communities and societies alike, which needs far greater attention and resources than it is currently receiving. The fundamental purpose of the Decade is to increase national and international efforts to address this problem. The time for action has come.

4. This report concludes with recommendations for the future and a plea for the political will and increased resources required to effectively address the literacy problems facing many countries, especially but not only in the developing world. The success of the Decade will depend on the commitments made and actions taken by all stakeholders, including Governments, United Nations organizations, development agencies, donors, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, communities and individuals. Just as education for all is everyone's responsibility, so, too, is the United Nations Literacy Decade.

B. Current state of literacy in the world

5. What, then, is the state of literacy in the world today? Recent estimates suggest that approximately 862 million adults (persons over age 15) were illiterate in the year 2000.¹ Because of the limitations affecting the quality of the statistical assessment of and reporting on literacy worldwide, many experts think that this number represents a considerable underestimation of the situation and suggest that the truer figure may be closer to 1 billion people.

6. Official estimates indicate that 140 million of the 862 million people who were illiterate were young people (aged 15-24 years). An equally disturbing statistic is that in 2000, over 104 million school-age children did not even have access to schooling and that girls were less likely than boys to enjoy such access.² Furthermore, there continues to be a marked gender dimension to adult illiteracy: in

2000, two thirds of illiterate adults were women and there were 236 million more illiterate women than illiterate men.

7. The stark reality, therefore, is that one in five adults on the planet and tens of millions of school-age children do not read and write. This is both appalling and unacceptable. As the Secretary-General said in his remarks at the official launch of the Decade: "The fact that 20 per cent of the world's adults are deprived of it (literacy) should fill us all with shame."³

C. What is the United Nations Literacy Decade designed to accomplish?

8. In policy terms, the Decade is primarily focused on the realization of the six goals contained in the Dakar Framework for Action: Education for All: Meeting Our Collective Commitments.⁴ Literacy is not limited to just one or a few of these EFA goals; rather, as stated in the International Plan of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade: "Literacy is the common thread that runs through the six goals."⁵

9. Nonetheless, the specific commitments made in the Dakar Framework for Action are worth noting: achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults (goal 4); ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes (goal 3); and improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills (goal 6).

10. In addition to the EFA agenda agreed in Dakar, another central policy dimension of the Decade is the United Nations Millennium Declaration⁶ with its Millennium Development Goals proclaimed on 8 September 2000. The primary focus of the Millennium Development Goals is upon the eradication of poverty. There is no question that the achievement of literacy and the eradication of poverty are linked.

11. The Fast-Track Initiative, led by the World Bank, is focused on meeting the Millennium Development Goal of achieving universal completion of primary education by 2015. This is another part of the policy framework of the Decade, as the successful completion of primary education by children and youth will help to staunch the flow of young illiterate persons into the pool of adult illiterate persons, thereby adding to their total.

12. While all agree that the education of children is critically important, the evidence (statistical and otherwise) makes it clear that Governments and agencies need to expand their attention to adult literacy and learning as well. The reason is that parents influence their children, both in word and in deed. Literate parents raise literate children. Research findings show that parents with higher levels of education and literacy are in a better position to build a strong foundation for literacy in their children.⁷ Yet, there are millions of adults who cannot read and write, and millions more whose literacy skills are insufficient. Ensuring that these mothers and fathers can read is an urgent and pressing concern.⁸

13. It is clearly desirable that United Nations policies should reflect an integrated approach to the realization of the EFA goals and the Millennium Development

Goals. An endeavour of the magnitude of the Literacy Decade can succeed only if the macropolicy instruments driving the effort are appropriately aligned. The importance of this cannot be underestimated. For the Decade to succeed, there must be a clear recognition of the extent to which the presence or absence of literacy skills in a population is linked to the potential for societies to deal with poverty, discrimination, poor health, social exclusion and powerlessness. Literacy is at the heart of the social, political, cultural, economic and civic well-being of all individuals, both children and adults, as well as that of communities, societies and nations.

D. Will the world achieve the goals of the Decade?

14. According to present trends, it is unlikely that the goals of the Decade will be met unless appropriate actions are taken. Sadly, available evidence suggests that the fourth Dakar goal calling for a 50 per cent improvement in the levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, will not be met in over 70 countries. Current projections are that there will be roughly 800 million illiterate adults worldwide in 2015.⁹ Moreover, it is estimated that the majority (63 per cent) will be women. Estimates suggest that illiterate women will outnumber illiterate men by a projected 215 million in 2015.

15. The statistics presented in the *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4* show that 98 per cent of adults who lack literacy, or 857 million people, live in the developing world. The *Report* states: "Almost half of the world's illiterates live in South and West Asia. Their numbers are still increasing and mainly reflect the situation of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan. The East Asia and the Pacific region accounts for almost a further quarter."¹⁰ Sub-Saharan Africa has almost 136 million illiterates. These three regions account for 70 per cent of the world total. Sixty-one per cent of those who lack literacy live in the four most populous countries of the world: China, Pakistan, Bangladesh and India.

16. As noted earlier, in 2000 there were 140 million illiterate young people (aged 15-24 years) in the world, of whom 86 million were female. Even assuming growth in primary education over the next decade, a projected 113 million young people will be illiterate in 2015, 60 million of them female.¹¹ If these forecasts are accurate and if current trends continue unchanged, the Dakar targets will not be met.

17. Tragically, scourges like poverty, exploitation, poor health and illiteracy go hand in hand. It is not a coincidence that where illiteracy is high, people face other, often dire, challenges. Sub-Saharan Africa, for example, is scarred by the HIV/AIDS pandemic. In parts of North Africa, in the Arab States and in South and East Asia, democracy is fragile and human rights, especially for women and girls, are severely limited. It is widely acknowledged that illiteracy compounds the conditions of deprivation and subordination to which women and girls in many parts of the world are being subjected.

18. However, the challenges of the Decade are not restricted to the costs and impediments imposed by illiteracy alone. Low literacy skills rob millions more of opportunities, limit their potential, and curtail their political and economic participation. The findings of the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) suggest that upward of 20 per cent of the adult population of the 20 countries participating in the Survey, including countries with the world's highest literacy

rates, have only rudimentary literacy skills. On average, the literacy skills of a further 20 per cent are below the level the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) thinks necessary for full participation in those societies and economies which are among the richest in the world.

19. The statistics cited point towards an unavoidable conclusion, namely, that national and international literacy efforts have been inadequate up to now. Every nation, from the poorest of the poor to the most technologically advanced and economically powerful, has literacy concerns. The Literacy Decade is designed to be the framework within which a much stronger impulse can be given to literacy efforts in the years ahead by all countries and development partners, working together and pursuing the same objectives.

E. What does literacy mean in the context of the Decade?

20. The meaning of the word "literacy" in the framework of the Decade is more complex than people might first imagine. We have long realized that literacy is not one term of a simple dichotomy — it is not something that you either have or don't have. There are levels of literacy skill, as demonstrated by IALS and the Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALL), which the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) being developed by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and its partners will endeavour to measure. Consequently, the questions of policy makers and literacy experts go far beyond simply asking whether someone can read and write. More relevant are answers to the following questions: How well do people read and write? How do they use these skills in their daily lives? What are they challenged to do with these skills? How can these skills be maintained and enhanced? What are the related problem-solving and life skills required by society and the economy? How can countries raise the literacy levels of their populations?

21. Literacy, to put it simply, "is about more than reading and writing — it is about how we communicate in society. It is about social practices and relations, about knowledge, language and culture".¹² Literacy reaches into and affects many areas of life. Literacy provides access to opportunities to learn, to find better employment¹³ and to earn higher financial rewards.¹⁴ Literacy also affects social status, political participation, cultural expression, linguistic survival, access to health care, the effective delivery of social services, and more.¹⁵ For individuals, the presence of literacy expands life opportunities, and expands the ability to participate meaningfully in all aspects of life; the absence of literacy contracts life opportunities and limits the ability to participate meaningfully in all aspects of life. The Decade defines literacy in this holistic way.

II. Launch of the United Nations Literacy Decade: highlights

A. International launch of the Decade

22. "Literacy as freedom" was the motto adopted for the official launch of the United Nations Literacy Decade. The inaugural ceremonies were co-chaired by the Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Director-General of UNESCO and held at the New York Public Library on 13 February 2003. The President of

Mongolia, representing the nation that had sponsored the resolution to establish the Decade, was present along with other notables including First Lady Mrs. Laura Bush, who assumed the role of Honorary Ambassador of the Decade at the request of UNESCO, and the President of the United Nations Association of the United States of America (UNA-USA). The launch included a media event, the opening of an inter-agency exhibition on literacy at United Nations Headquarters which lasted six weeks, and the distribution of Decade information kits and publications.

23. In their inaugural presentations at the launch, the two co-chairs explained the reasons why the Decade is needed, noting that in these, the beginning years of the twenty-first century, one-fifth of all adults were unable to read and write. They acknowledged literacy as the key to unlocking the cage of human misery, to delivering the potential of every human being and to opening up a future of freedom and hope. They affirmed that the Decade must translate such hope into reality. They also affirmed that the Decade was a call to focus the world's collective will on the enormity of the task ahead, going beyond efforts of the past to apply lessons learned from past experience. The Literacy Decade, they said, was a reminder that literacy was a human right. Fifty-five years ago, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (General Assembly resolution 217 A (III)) had established that everyone had the right to education. The co-chairs concluded that the fact that approximately 20 per cent of the world's adults were deprived of education should "fill us all with shame".¹⁶

B. The world's regions launch the Decade

1. Africa

24. The Literacy Decade was launched in the African region in conjunction with the biennial meeting of the Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) at Grand Baie, Mauritius, from 2 to 4 December 2003. The event was organized by the Government of Mauritius and UNESCO. At the launch ceremony, the President of Mauritius stressed the importance of linking literacy to gender. He also raised the issue of the promotion of literate environments, stating that the Decade should not be confined to seminar rooms and discussion groups and that it needed to reach the grass-roots level, ensuring the participation of all.

25. A number of African countries held special national events to launch the Decade. The President of Mozambique launched the Decade in that country on 30 April 2003 in a ceremony held at the Noresta Basic General School in Maputo. Senegal's launch took place on 14 September 2003 at Mbour in a ceremony presided over by its President, who reaffirmed the country's commitment to eradicating illiteracy. The Government of Guinea launched the Decade at an event held in Kondeba on 15 July 2003, using the occasion to draw attention to the country's literacy challenges. Mali chose mid-October as the time for its launch; a four-day workshop was held from 13 to 16 October to review the state of non-formal learning in the country and to launch the Decade.

2. Arab region

26. The Arab region launched the Literacy Decade in Tunisia during the Arab Regional Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA) Mid-decade Review held in Hammamet, Tunis, from 15 to 18 July 2003. Seventeen Arab

countries were present in addition to members of the Arab Network for Adult Education and Literacy, and other non-governmental organizations and civil society groups. The launch signalled the start of a newspaper and television media campaign organized by UNESCO Beirut.¹⁷

3. Asia-Pacific region

27. The Asia-Pacific region of UNESCO launched the Decade on 8 September 2003 (International Literacy Day) in Bangkok, Thailand, with technical and financial support from the Governments of Thailand and Japan. The launch occurred in conjunction with the Thai celebrations of Education Week and the opening of the Mid-term Review of the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTAE+6).

28. Earlier in the year, on 2 April 2003, Thailand had held its national launch of the Decade and kicked off a national literacy essay contest and drawing competition, the results of which were on display in September at the Asia-Pacific inauguration of the Decade. During the summer, the Ministry of Education in Pakistan issued information kits entitled "Guidelines for the Strategic Framework of Action for the United Nations Literacy Decade in Pakistan" explaining the country's policies in the field of literacy. In December, UNESCO Islamabad and the Pakistan Ministry of Primary and Mass Education held a subregional training workshop on literacy and non-formal education as a means of alleviating poverty.

4. Latin America and the Caribbean region

29. The Latin America and the Caribbean regional launch was held in Santiago, Chile, at the Second Latin American Regional Meeting of EFA National Coordinators and Representatives of Civil Society Organizations, held on 24 September 2003.

30. On 20 May 2003, UNESCO-Brazil, the Ministry of Education, the Senate and other parliamentarians launched the United Nations Literacy Decade in Brazil. To mark the occasion, UNESCO-Brazil and the Ministry of Education signed an agreement for the training of literacy and adult educators.

31. Peru has also been engaged in celebrating the Decade. The Government drew attention to the Decade by establishing a target of a 50 per cent reduction in illiteracy by 2012 as part of its National Literacy Programme.¹⁸ The Government announced that, between 2001 and 2003, 383,519 illiterate people from 19 regions of Peru had received training and 128,572 had been certified as literate. At the same time, 600 District Committees for Literacy had been created. Plans call for the training of 120,000 illiterate persons in 2004. From 2005 to 2012, an additional 250,000 persons will be trained annually, according to government plans.

32. In Saint Lucia, the Official Launch of the Decade took place on 4 and 5 February 2003 as part of a Symposium on "Literacy and Gender: A National Concern". The Governor General of Saint Lucia declared the Decade open on the island. This two-day event featured presentations on the state of literacy in the Caribbean, literacy and the teacher, literacy and productivity, male underachievement in the schools system, and gender participation in the National Enrichment and Learning Programme as well as presentations by regional participants from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago.

33. The Ministry of Education in El Salvador reported a broad range of actions for the first year of the Decade. Approval was given for an EFA Action Plan (2003-2015), 5,000 literacy circles were organized, 100,000 people were beneficiaries of literacy programmes, and 200 teacher-training courses were established, among other things.

34. In Paraguay, the Ministry of Education and Culture reported that it had created both formal and non-formal literacy programmes as part of its Decade-related efforts.¹⁹ The formal Programme of Bilingual Education for Youth and Adults (PRODEPA KO'E PYAHU) offers literacy and basic education for persons who have not finished their primary education. In 2003, 24,000 persons were registered, with an anticipated target of 185,000 enrolments within four years. During 2003, curricula, educational kits, textbooks, manuals for evaluation and other materials were designed, produced and distributed by the programme. A new building for the Dirección de Jóvenes y Adultos, including a training centre, opened in April 2004. The programme has also started a distance education component via Internet called "Aula Mentor". Special attention is paid to literacy and basic education in prisons, through bilingual basic education and in-service training for teachers, experts and administrative staff.

5. European and North American activities

35. The launch ceremony for the Decade in Canada was held on 4 September 2003 at the country's National Library in Ottawa. Broadcast live in French and English, the Canadian launch programme featured Ms. Kim Phuc Phan Thi, the woman whose childhood image had captured the world and defined the Vietnam War. Ms. Phuc, now a Canadian citizen and UNESCO Goodwill Ambassador for Peace, chronicled her own learning journey and the challenges she had faced along the way.

36. In Washington, D.C., a special celebration to mark the Decade was held at the Embassy of Bangladesh featuring speeches by the President of the Reading Association and the United States Deputy Assistant Secretary of Education. A round table was held on literacy and gender and an exhibition on literacy was opened. A media campaign was begun involving the Public Broadcasting System (PBS) series entitled "Children of the Code".

III. Activities of United Nations organizations and other international literacy partners

37. In addition to these launch ceremonies and related activities, there have been a number of other efforts to build momentum around the Decade and to address literacy needs. Many of them feature partnerships involving United Nations organizations and other international organizations. To encourage these kinds of partnerships, the UNESCO Basic Education Division, as the UNESCO headquarters team coordinating the Decade, organized a United Nations Inter-Agency Working Group to share information on Decade activities being undertaken by involved organizations. The first meeting was held at UNESCO headquarters in Paris in November 2002 where agency representatives discussed how they could contribute to the launch of the Decade and to the implementation of its strategies. On 6 and 7 April 2004, UNESCO hosted a second Inter-Agency Working Group session under the title "The UNLD Consultative Meeting", again at its headquarters. This

second session offered an opportunity for United Nations organizations and other interested partners to report on the activities they had undertaken since the launch of the initiative.

38. One result of this collaboration was the creation of a special information kit entitled "Literacy as Freedom" explaining the various roles and interests of the United Nations organizations in respect of literacy, with a special emphasis on their planned contributions to the Decade. The kit included information on the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the World Food Programme (WFP) and the World Bank. As noted earlier, there was an inter-agency exhibition as part of the official launch in New York.

39. It is to be noted that the Decade partners selected the theme "Literacy and gender" for the first biennium of the Decade in recognition of the serious gender disparities regarding literacy, especially as these relate to women and girls. In addition, of course, this choice of thematic emphasis was made in light of the imminence of the 2005 EFA and Millennium Development Goals target relating to the elimination of gender disparities in primary and secondary education.

A. United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)

40. UNICEF has considerable interest in the goals of the Decade.²⁰ This specialized agency provides assistance for school-based programmes on mother-tongue literacy and life skills. It sustains non-formal education for young people, usually with a focus on adolescent health issues and HIV/AIDS. Women's literacy is a priority for UNICEF and its programmes for them are linked to early childcare practices, microfinance and agriculture, along with other income-generating activities. UNICEF is supporting capacity development for literacy trainers and the strengthening of literacy assessment.

41. UNICEF is implementing approximately 50 literacy and literacy-related projects, demonstrating its support for literacy programmes and activities as the Decade begins. The following are representative examples. The agency is supporting projects in Kazakhstan and Bolivia in which women's literacy and early childcare programmes are integrated. In Kosovo, UNICEF is working with Turkish, Bosnian and Ashkaelia minority groups, providing literacy to 2,300 women and girls. Literacy and learning programmes for young children and adolescents are being supported in Uganda, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Somalia, the Sudan, Cambodia and Lesotho. Literacy is linked to life skills and other programmes in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Myanmar, Yemen, Swaziland and Malawi. Linkages of literacy for women to life skills, vocational and management training and income-generating activities are features of programmes in Yemen, Uganda, Pakistan and Burkina Faso. Back-to-school campaigns are being supported in Afghanistan, Angola and Liberia, countries facing humanitarian crises or conflict situations. A strong and pervasive feature of UNICEF work in the period 2002-2004 has been the focus on the theme of "Literacy, girls and women".

B. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)

42. An EFA Flagship Programme of great relevance to the Decade is the Education for Rural People (ERP) initiative being jointly led by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and UNESCO. ERP has a gender dimension that fits the priority being given to the literacy of women and girls in the first two years of the Decade.

43. ERP made significant strides during 2003, including a global study undertaken by FAO and UNESCO/International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) on "Education for rural development: towards new policy responses". The study's goal is to build awareness regarding the importance of education for rural people in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The study found that this could be best achieved by increasing rural people's access to quality basic education and by increasing national capacity to implement basic education plans that address the learning needs of rural populations. The study is presented in the first of a new series of publications on Education for Rural People launched as part of the collaboration of UNESCO/IIEP with FAO. A web page was produced for the ERP initiative and can be found at <http://www.fao.org/sd/erp/>.

44. In addition to these activities, there has been an ERP pilot project that was started in Kosovo to develop a national strategy to address the learning needs of rural people there. Similar efforts have been undertaken in Serbia and Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia. A preliminary project formulation mission has been undertaken in Mozambique. Since 2002, more than a hundred academic, public or civil society organizations have become ERP flagship members and are organizing national events under the Education for Rural People banner. A national event organized by ERP partners was held in Venezuela in May 2004. In 2003, the European Commission approved a joint project presented by the Italian non-governmental organization Associazione di Cooperazione Rurale in Africa e America Latina (ACRA) in collaboration with FAO and UNESCO. The project is being carried out, in collaboration with six European non-governmental organizations, to provide capacity-building of civil society organizations and to increase public awareness of the importance of ERP in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, France and Italy as well as Senegal, Chad, the United Republic of Tanzania, Chile and Bolivia.

C. World Food Programme (WFP)

45. The World Food Programme (WFP)²¹ supports the Decade through programmes contributing to improving the literacy situation in many poor countries. Again, special attention is given to women and adolescent girls. WFP is strongly committed to education and literacy, as demonstrated through its broad framework, strategy and policy priorities that include both Education for All and commitments to women.

46. The WFP programme goal for 2004-2007 is to contribute to meeting the Millennium Development Goals through food-assisted interventions targeted at populations facing poverty and hunger. WFP operations focus on five strategic priorities. One of them is aimed at directly addressing the issue of equitable access to education and continuing education for adults. In addition, the School Feeding

Programme, which supports EFA, fed 12.3 million children in 2000 and 16 million in 2003, and it expects to feed 32 million by 2005 and 50 million by 2007. WFP contributes to adult literacy through its food-for-training activities. Literacy and numeracy training are considered part of an overall package, along with life skills, for addressing the practical and strategic needs of women and adolescent girls.

D. World Bank

47. The World Bank²² reports an active role in adult education in both literacy and non-formal learning. For the World Bank, poverty reduction means more than raising incomes: it also means investing in improving health, building sustainable agriculture, forging gender equity, ensuring access to quality education, preserving natural resources and empowering local communities to play a larger role in social governance. The World Bank states that for adult education to contribute to poverty reduction, it must be closely linked to those different fields where poverty is rooted. The World Bank reports that it has been trying to position itself at this intersection for several years in order to assist adult educators in effecting the new linkages and to persuade counterparts in other sectors of the critical importance of adult learning strategies within their own fields of operation.

E. United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)

48. UNIFEM, another United Nations partner organization, reports that it has launched a publication entitled *Progress of the World's Women: Gender Equality and the Millennium Development Goals* (New York, UNIFEM, 2002). The publication tracks, among others indicators, female youth literacy rates and secondary school enrolment ratios using figures from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.²³

F. United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)

49. The United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)²⁴ has a mandate and programme priorities anchored in the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development²⁵ held in Cairo in 1994. The Programme of Action devoted an entire chapter to education (chap. XI) and focused on the following objectives, each with a set of recommended actions: (a) to achieve universal access to quality education, in particular to primary and technical education and job training; (b) to combat illiteracy (the eradication of which is one of the prerequisites of human development) and to eliminate gender disparities in educational opportunities and support; (c) to promote non-formal education for young people; and (d) to introduce and improve the content of the curriculum so as to promote greater responsibility towards, and awareness of, the interrelationships between population and sustainable development; health issues (including reproductive health) and gender equity (para. 11.5). The Programme of Action also recognized that eradication of illiteracy is one of the prerequisites for human development (para. 11.6).

G. International Labour Organization (ILO)

50. The International Labour Organization (ILO)²⁶ has joined the international community in promoting EFA. It does so within the context of the Decent Work Agenda. This concerns not only child labour but also ILO efforts towards developing vocational and skills training, promoting the status of teachers, and upholding the rights of teachers' organizations. ILO addresses literacy issues in several different ways. For example, the International Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour (IPEC) has clearly demonstrated that achieving the availability of free quality education is one of the most important means of keeping children out of the workforce and of breaking the vicious cycle of poverty and child labour over the long run. For ILO, the progressive elimination of child labour and the international community's efforts to achieve EFA, especially universal primary education by 2015, are inextricably linked. ILO maintains that the prevention and elimination of child labour should be an objective for educational policy worldwide, with free, compulsory education up to the minimum age for entering employment, as defined by the ILO Convention concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment (Convention No. 38) (1973).

H. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

51. UNESCO is fulfilling its role as the international coordinator of the Decade in a variety of ways, including the already noted convening of two inter-agency meetings to share information and plan strategies, as well as the coordination of the Decade regional launch events. UNESCO has also worked, through its regional and cluster offices and with national commissions for UNESCO, to encourage the promotion of the Decade and to assist member States in holding their own Decade launch activities.

52. UNESCO is also working on a number of projects in concert with other partners. For example, UNESCO, in cooperation with Japanese Funds-in-Trust (JFIT), is working on a special project entitled "Literacy and Non-Formal Education Development in Afghanistan" (LAND-AFGHAN). Progress was made on this project during 2003 despite security concerns, a lack of basic information on literacy in the country, and a weakened Afghan infrastructure. A national survey of learners' needs was carried out across 400 literacy centres in the 32 provinces of the country. Based on the survey, the national curriculum was developed. According to the developed curriculum, national primers, a teachers' guide and 30 supplementary materials are being developed. UNESCO handbooks and tools have been also adapted and translated into two Afghan national languages.

53. A partnership has been established to promote an initiative to develop "Information-literate Societies". An initial meeting was held in Prague from 20 to 23 September 2003, organized jointly by the United States National Commission on Libraries and Information Science (NCLIS) and the National Forum on Information Literacy (NIFL). UNESCO provided financial support from the special United States Contribution to UNESCO for 2003, and participated actively in the meeting. The objectives were to develop a clearer and more comprehensive vision of the role of information literacy; to develop a working definition of the field; and to make

preliminary recommendations for a global congress on information literacy. Forty experts from 23 countries attended the meeting.

54. The jury for the UNESCO International Literacy Prizes met in Paris from 19 to 23 May 2003. Thirty projects from around the world were nominated for the four awards and the presentation of the prizes took place on International Literacy Day (8 September 2003) prior to the opening of CONFITEA+6 in Bangkok. The jury had decided to adopt "Literacy and gender" as the theme for the 2003 and 2004 prizes, given that this was the theme for the Decade during this biennium.

55. The jury selected the following projects for recognition. The International Reading Association Literacy Award was presented to the Dhaka Ahsania Mission, Bangladesh. The Noma Literacy Prize went to the Panuka Trust, Zambia. The King Sejong Literacy Prizes were awarded to the Tembaletu Community Education Centre, South Africa, and the International Reflect Circle (CIRAC). There were four honourable mentions as well: the Fundación Alfabetizadora LAUBACH (Colombia), for the International Reading Association Award; the Ribat Al Fath Association for Sustainable Development (Morocco) for the Noma Prize; and the Youth and Adult Literacy and Education Chair, Latin American and Caribbean Pedagogic Institute, Cuba, and the National Guard Directorate of Educational and Cultural Affairs, Saudi Arabia, for the King Sejong Literacy Prizes.

56. The jury met from 10 to 14 May 2004 at UNESCO headquarters in Paris to award the International Reading Association Literacy Award and the King Sejong Literacy Prizes for the year 2004. Again, "Literacy and gender" was the theme selected. There were 28 candidates nominated by Governments for the prizes. The jury unanimously decided on the following recipients. The International Reading Association Literacy Award was presented to the Edikasyon pu travayer organization, which had been nominated by the Government of Mauritius. The two King Sejong Literacy Prizes were awarded to Alfabetização Solidária (AlfaSol) (Solidarity in Literacy), which had been nominated by the Government of Brazil, and the Steering Group of Literacy Education in Qinghai Province, which had been nominated by the Government of China.

57. One major issue is the lack of reliable data on the state of literacy in the developing world. The current weaknesses in the methods used to gather literacy data arise from the fact that those data are usually based on general household or population census data reliant upon self-assessments or on educational proxies as measures of literacy attainment. There is no question that good data are needed in order to understand the current literacy and adult learning situations in developing countries, and to design appropriate interventions in training and policy-making. There is also a need to develop methods for assessing literacy and numeracy skills directly, and to measure participation in formal and non-formal adult education and training in developing countries.

58. To that end, in 2003, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics launched the Literacy Assessment and Monitoring Programme (LAMP) in cooperation with a number of stakeholders including UNESCO headquarters, the UNESCO Institute for Education (UIE), the World Bank, various international agencies and technical experts in literacy assessment. Collaboration with local and regional organizations is also expected. LAMP is testing a methodology to measure literacy skills directly in order to provide participating countries with data of high quality. It will use five levels of

literacy proficiency and will be compatible with the pioneering work done on the International Adult Literacy Survey (IALS) in industrialized countries.

59. UNESCO, the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) and UIE joined forces to organize an "Expert Meeting on Literacy" in Paris from 10 to 12 June 2003. The focus of the meeting was a definition and expanded notion of literacy and a discussion of the proposed LAMP initiative. The meeting also considered the UNESCO Education Sector's position paper on the plural notion of "literacies".

60. Similarly, UNESCO efforts are also being directed at the need for more complete information on non-formal education, especially the monitoring of progress towards EFA targets. UNESCO has begun its Monitoring and Evaluation of Non-formal Education Programme. A prototype non-formal education monitoring methodology is being field-tested in the United Republic of Tanzania, Cambodia and India where Non-Formal Education Management Information Systems (NFE-MIS) are being set up and operationalized.

61. CONFINTEA+6 was a mid-term review of developments in the field of adult education since 1997, when the Fifth International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA V) had been held in Hamburg, Germany. The next international conference will be held in 2009. UIE organized this 90-nation conference in Bangkok from 8 to 11 September 2003. The event was opened on International Literacy Day just after the launch of the United Nations Literacy Decade in the Asia-Pacific region.

IV. Work in progress: current projects addressing Literacy Decade objectives

62. As a companion to the present report, UNESCO is publishing a public document rich in details on the kinds of work currently being done to achieve Decade objectives in both the developing and the developed world. This publication is part of the UNESCO awareness-raising campaign for the Decade. In the fuller report, there are over 100 projects cited as examples of "work in progress". They include projects addressing the literacy needs of women and girls, and efforts to reach those excluded from the mainstream such as ethnic and linguistic minorities. There are examples of new programmes designed to create literate environments.

63. To provide an idea of what UNESCO has found in its research and the range of projects discussed in the fuller report, in terms of innovative approaches, strategies, methodologies and models being used to provide basic literacy, to enhance literacy skills or to create conditions favourable to learners and learning, the following examples are given directly below. They exemplify many of the strategies and actions outlined in the International Plan of Action for the Decade and include:

(a) Projects, such as the Programa Integrar of the Brazilian Metalworkers' Union, that integrate training for work with general education;²⁷

(b) Programmes that link adult basic education with lifelong learning;²⁸

(c) Action-oriented programmes where adult educators work under the same conditions as learners. Two examples are the Adult Education for Alternative Farming Methods and Health-care Programme in Argentina involving agricultural workers²⁹ and Frontier College in Canada which works with inner-city youth,

prisoners and migrant farm workers. In both cases, the objective is to build mutual trust and respect between educators and learners so as to facilitate learning;

(d) Peer education programmes such as the "My Future is My Choice" Life Skill Programme in Namibia, where young people teach their peers about health-related issues, and the Adolescent Peer Education Programme in Belize which is directed towards healthy lifestyles, with a focus on combating HIV/AIDS;

(e) Teacher-training projects, such as one identified in Albania, that use an individual learning strategy approach that is fully adapted to a learner's learning style. Careful attention is given to where the learning takes place and to other environmental factors that affect learning.³⁰ Another example is the Individual Interest Promotion Programmes being run in continuing education centres in Kerala, India;³¹

(f) A combination of learning and interactive networking involving female participants and mentors called "net-learning" which encourages experimental learning methods and approaches;³²

(g) A productive community-based model in Bolivia called the Alternative Education Programme for Young and Adult Persons of the Centro de Educación Técnica Humanística Agropecuaria (CETHA)-Emborozú, which uses an integrative curriculum;³³

(h) A strategy of reorienting rural schools as community learning centres which is used, for example, in China where the role of rural schools is expanded to encompass their serving as community learning centres;³⁴

(i) Adult learners' weeks or learning festivals³⁵ which are used as an awareness-raising strategy to reach many in a short period of time.

64. In addition, a number of other examples can be found in the (most recent) *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4*. It provides a full chapter on "Lessons from good practice" (chap. 4) related to closing the gender gap and promoting equality in education.³⁶ Several of those lessons touch on literacy. Overall, the *EFA Global Monitoring Report* focus is on issues such as public policy-making that is appropriate for the needs of girls and women and for their learning objectives: creating an enabling environment; investing in redistribution by targeting resources to needed areas; and the introduction of education reforms. While these measures are centred on the issues of gender disparities and gender equality as they affect women and girls, they also apply to other people who are "literacy-disadvantaged".

65. The *EFA Global Monitoring Report* also explains how historical circumstances can provide lessons for the future. One example cited concerns the "Kerala model" drawn from the Indian State of the same name. The impact of a matrilineal culture and the efforts of an early modernizing State complemented one another in the creation of unprecedented social and educational developments for women during the early twentieth century.³⁷

66. The *EFA Global Monitoring Report* then turns to examples of practices that reduce the costs of girls' education and reduce child labour. These measures include: scholarships for girls, income support schemes, school feeding programmes, addressing the needs of pregnant girls, preventing HIV/AIDS, combating gender-based violence, working with teachers, curriculum reforms, empowering women teachers, measures for out-of-school girls, and expanding early childhood care.

V. Conclusions

67. The United Nations Literacy Decade faces many challenges, especially at the national level and particularly in those countries where the levels of illiteracy are highest. There is also a growing concern that the issue of literacy is not sufficiently high in the agendas of both the developed and developing countries of the world to generate the kind of political and economic support required to address global illiteracy challenges.

68. The achievement of the goals of the United Nations Literacy Decade will be possible only through the collective efforts of all the stakeholders, including United Nations organizations, bilateral and multilateral agencies, every State Member of the United Nations, non-governmental organizations, civil society and the private sector. The challenge, therefore, is to expand and enhance partnerships involving these actors, to mobilize public awareness, to share information on good practices, to leverage resources, to coordinate activities, to monitor progress and to report on the achievement of the United Nations Literacy Decade goals.

69. The success of the United Nations Literacy Decade will depend heavily on the extent to which literacy policy makers and practitioners at the national level (Governments, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations and communities) have the resources and the scope they require to be able to play a substantial role in addressing the literacy challenge. Success will come not from the top but from people working at the grass-roots level in their communities as well as through the combined efforts of practitioners and learners.

70. During the first stage of the United Nations Literacy Decade, attention clearly has been focused on its launch at international, regional and national levels. This activity has involved sizeable human and financial investments throughout 2003 and in early 2004. It is as yet too soon to tell how much the Decade call to action has elicited increased resources and heightened levels of activity, although this report contains some promising indications that the various literacy partners are gearing themselves up for greater efforts.

71. The information contained in this report, especially regarding the many new approaches to the provision of literacy skills, provides a foundation for some hope. It testifies to the fact that we are on the right path. However, real diligence, strength of commitment, relentless effort and appropriate resources are required if the United Nations is to meet its objectives for 2012 and if the EFA goals are to be met by 2015.

72. While the positive actions reported here are a basis for some optimism, they must be viewed through the prism of realism. The only conclusion that can be drawn in mid-2004 is that, on current trends, the world is unlikely to meet the literacy challenges that lay before it by 2012 (the end of the Decade) or by 2015 (the target date for the achievement of the EFA goals). However, this is not a prediction: everything depends on the literacy-related actions that are taken in the period ahead and their scope, effectiveness and impact.

VI. Recommendations

73. Member States, especially those countries where levels of illiteracy are high and/or illiterate populations are large, should mobilize the political will and financial resources required to meet the literacy challenges that they face. The case must be made for the importance of investments in literacy and basic education not only for children but also for youth and adults. We know from research findings that literate parents raise literate children. It is vital to galvanize the necessary leadership and resources if a 50 per cent improvement in adult literacy levels is to be secured by 2015.

74. The international community, including United Nations organizations and bilateral and multilateral development agencies, is hereby encouraged to collectively support the efforts of those countries with particular needs by providing the financial and technical assistance required to improve their literacy policies and programmes. Such enhanced support is necessary if the United Nations Literacy Decade goals are to be achieved.

75. The international community should also address the need for an effective and substantive integration of United Nations Literacy Decade efforts with the EFA and Millennium Development Goals processes and for an enhanced linkage between the Decade and other global initiatives such as the UNICEF-led United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI), the EFA Flagship Programme on Education for Rural People (ERP) and the forthcoming United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development, 2005-2014. An integrated approach is essential. For the United Nations Literacy Decade to succeed, there must be a clear recognition of the extent to which a significant lack of literacy skills limits the potential for societies to deal with issues such as poverty, gender discrimination, poor health, HIV/AIDS, environmental degradation, social exclusion and powerlessness.

76. Civil society, non-governmental organizations and the private sector, as important development partners in respect of the United Nations Literacy Decade, should mobilize their constituencies to enhance the implementation of the Decade's International Plan of Action at the national, subregional, regional and international levels.

77. As the lead coordinating agency at the international level, UNESCO, in collaboration with its partners, should help the United Nations to document and report on the progress that Member States make towards the achievement of the goals established for the Decade and to encourage sustained commitment over the duration of the initiative to 2012. The progress reports should be submitted to the General Assembly biennially, beginning in 2005. Effective reporting will be possible only if clear goals are established for the short, medium and long term at the national level with respect to the strategies, expected outcomes and areas of activity of the International Plan of Action.

78. UNESCO, along with all the stakeholders involved in the United Nations Literacy Decade, should enhance the ongoing awareness-raising efforts designed to increase the knowledge, understanding and interest of the general public and decision makers with regard to the Decade and its objectives. UNESCO shall consult widely on how information about the Decade, especially progress in literacy achievements, monitoring and partnerships, can best be shared. Of particular importance is the need to share information about good and appropriate practices.

Notes

- ¹ The figure reported is 861,966,000 (UNESCO, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4: Gender and Education for All: The Leap to Equality* (Paris, 2004), statistical annex, p. 310, table 2, and narrative text, p. 86).
- ² Ibid. The figure reported is 104,189,000 (p. 335, table 5).
- ³ United Nations press release entitled "Secretary-General's remarks to mark the launch of the United Nations Literacy Decade", New York, 13 February 2003.
- ⁴ See United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Final Report of the World Education Forum, Dakar, Senegal, 26-28 April 2000* (Paris, 2000), para. 7.
- ⁵ See report of the Secretary-General entitled, "United Nations Literacy Decade: education for all; International Plan of Action: implementation of General Assembly resolution 56/116" (A/57/218 and Corr. 1), para. 3.
- ⁶ See General Assembly resolution 55/2.
- ⁷ Statistics Canada and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society* (Ottawa and Paris, 1997), p. 29.
- ⁸ For a general discussion of the relationship between parental skills and those of their children, see R. Haveman and B. Wolfe, *Succeeding Generations and the Effects of Investment in Children* (New York, Russell Sage Foundation, 1994).
- ⁹ *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4* ..., table 2.21.
- ¹⁰ Ibid., p. 86.
- ¹¹ Ibid., statistical annex, table 2.
- ¹² UNESCO, *Literacy: A UNESCO Perspective* (Paris, 2003), p. 1.
- ¹³ Daniel Boothby, *Literacy Skills, Occupational Assignment and the Returns to Over- and Under-Education* (Ottawa, Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, January 2002).
- ¹⁴ Lars Osberg, *Schooling, Literacy and Individual Earnings* (Ottawa, Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, June 2000); and David A. Green and W. Craig Riddell, *Literacy, Numeracy and Labour Market Outcomes in Canada* (Ottawa, Statistics Canada and Human Resources Development Canada, January 2001).
- ¹⁵ OECD and Statistics Canada, *Literacy Skills for the Knowledge Society* (Paris and Ottawa, 1997), p. 107.
- ¹⁶ United Nations press release entitled "Secretary-General's remarks to mark the launch of the United Nations Literacy Decade", New York, 13 February 2003; and UNESCO, "Message by the Director-General of UNESCO to Mark the Launch of the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012)", 13 February 2003, para. 3.

- ¹⁷ United Nations Literacy Decade, UNESCO web site: <http://www.unesco.org>. Path: Education (accessed 10 September 2004).
- ¹⁸ Ministry resolution No. 271-2003-ED (20 February 2003).
- ¹⁹ Information sent by the Paraguayan Ministry of Education (Dirección General de Educación Permanente), 19 March 2004.
- ²⁰ "Literacy and development: a focus on gender in the framework of UNLD", presentation by Cooper Dawson, Senior Adviser, UNICEF/New York, UNLD Consultative Meeting, UNESCO, Paris, 6 May 2004.
- ²¹ This information is taken from a presentation made by WFP at a consultative meeting on the United Nations Literacy Decade organized by UNESCO in Paris from 6 to 8 April 2004.
- ²² Information was provided by World Bank at the consultative meeting held in Paris (6-8 April 2004).
- ²³ Information provided by UNIFEM to UNESCO in March 2004.
- ²⁴ This information was provided by Delia Barcelona, Senior Technical Officer, Technical Support Division, UNFPA, New York.
- ²⁵ *Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.95.XIII.18), chap. I, resolution 1, annex.
- ²⁶ Facts on education's role in combating child labour, ILO.
- ²⁷ C. M. Bueno Fischer and J. Hannah, "(Re)constructing citizenship, 2002", available from www.integrarmetafrs.org.br (accessed 10 September 2004).
- ²⁸ M. Singh, ed., *Institutionalising Lifelong Learning: Creating Conducive Environments for Adult Learning in the Asian Context* (Hamburg, Germany, UIE, 2002); C. Medel-Añonuevo, ed., *Integrating Lifelong Learning Perspectives* (Hamburg, Germany, UIE, 2002).
- ²⁹ R. Aramendy, "Learning to fly", *Adult Education and Development (Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association)*, No. 53, pp. 265-285.
- ³⁰ V. Ristani, "The challenges of teacher training in Albania", in *Lifelong Learning Discourses in Europe*, Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo, ed. (Hamburg, Germany, UNESCO Institute for Education, 2003), pp. 159-160.
- ³¹ Kerala State Literacy Mission, "Beyond letters" project.
- ³² See work by Janneke Jellema, Project Manager, Socio Economic Institute (SEIN), Limburg University, Belgium.
- ³³ Alternative Education Programme for Young and Adult Persons of CETHA-Emborozú, Bolivia, CETHA Emborozú, Centro Experimental y Generador, "Educación y Vida: De la Práctica a la Teoría: Sistematización de la experiencia educativa de 1993 a 1999" (La Paz, 1999).
- ³⁴ Zh Tiedao, "Increasing learning opportunities in rural China: school community linkages and farmers' access to further learning", in *Institutionalising Lifelong Learning: Creating Conducive Environments for Adult Learning in the Asian Context*, M. Singh, ed. (Hamburg, Germany, UNESCO Institute for Education, 2002), pp. 179-181.
- ³⁵ B. Bochynek, "Mobilising for learning at the crossroads of international education policy frameworks: the role of adult learners weeks and lifelong learning festivals", in *Lifelong Learning Discourses in Europe*, Carolyn Medel-Añonuevo, ed. (Hamburg, Germany, UNESCO Institute for Education, 2003) pp. 169-177.
- ³⁶ *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003/4* ..., chap. 4, pp. 155-189.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 156.